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ABSTRACT

This guide contains suggestions for citizens to follow in exploring and addressing policies that affect children. The guide focuses on federal child policy, but the strategies described also apply to policies at the state and local levels. The first part of the guide describes sources of information on government policies relating to children. These sources include media, libraries, elected representatives, Congressional committees, child advocacy groups, and federal programs that affect children. Relevant federal programs address issues of family income, nutrition, social services, education, health, and housing. Federal tax credits and exemptions also affect families with children. The second part of the guide offers suggestions for taking action on behalf of children. Recommended actions include voting, supporting candidates, writing letters, attending and organizing public events, and advocating and lobbying. Points of entry for citizens into the policymaking process are listed. A 15-item list of suggested readings and resources is provided. (BC)

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Taking Steps For Children

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A Citizen's Guide To Child Policy

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TAKING STEPS FOR CHILDREN

A Citizen's Guide to Child Policy

Michigan Program in Child Development and Social Policy
Ann Arbor, Michigan

We dedicate this guide to you—the everyday citizen and ultimate safeguard of our nation's children. Our purpose is to pull together, in one source, information that will help you learn more about the national policies that protect and serve children. It is our hope that as you become better informed, you will be moved to act on behalf of our youngest citizens.

This guide contains a set of tools to use in exploring and addressing the policies that affect children. Although it focuses on federal child policy, the strategies described also apply to policies at the state and local levels. Your efforts can be mounted on many fronts.

Many of today's children live precarious lives, despite enlightened policies meant to address their needs. Even the most effective policies need continual tinkering. Time passes, circumstances change. Well-intended policies may prove inadequate or produce undesired consequences. Inequities may arise as policies get implemented—from state to state, and over time. Your vigilance and willingness to watch out for children can be vital to their well-being. Taking steps to champion our children is a responsibility and privilege we can all share.

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TAKING STEPS FOR CHILDREN

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STEP ONE: Gathering Information

" I want to have a say in the policies that affect children's lives! Where do I start?"

You can be involved—it only takes know-how and effort. Your first step is to become informed. As an **informed constituent** you will be in a better position to understand what needs changing and how to have a say in the process. Although information gathering can seem a daunting task, it need not be when you know where to look.

"How do I go about gathering information?"

Media

You may not need to conduct extensive research to begin learning more about child policy. The **media** offer ready access to the everyday happenings in Washington, DC, your state capital, and your local community. Beyond reporting the news, the media also provide other important information. Newspapers, television, and radio all announce relevant events that can lead you to the individuals or groups who share your concerns. For instance, to gain an understanding of local politics, attend the meetings of your city council. Join your PTA and follow the deliberations of your school board to learn about school policy. Pay attention to flyers and posted notices, and to announcements from your religious organization and local community center. These valuable resources are everywhere and available to you on a daily basis.

"But what if I want more in-depth information?"

Library

For more detailed information on the policies that affect children, one place to turn is to your **local library**. Our government is not only an implementer of policy, it is also a vast source of information. It conducts extensive research, supported by your tax dollars. Find the "government depository library" in the area where you live—every congressional district has at least one. There you will discover a wealth of information about your issues of concern:

Start with your **reference librarian.** Don't hesitate to ask questions. Get directions to the resources you need. Following are some of the government documents and other publications you will find useful.

- The *U.S. Census* is a veritable treasure trove of information. Extensive data on population and housing from the 1990 *Census* are already available, with total results scheduled to appear over the next two years.

- The *Congressional Record* contains the day-to-day transcript of U.S. House and Senate procedure, including the "floor debates" and all the materials submitted by congressional members "for the record." An index with key words, bill numbers, and identifying names will guide you to points of interest.

- The *Federal Register* is the daily publication of emerging regulations and legal notices issued by executive agencies. It includes presidential proclamations, executive orders, and federal agency documents. Information is listed by agency in the table of contents.

- *Congressional committee reports, hearings, and prints* contain the proceedings, findings, and materials produced by congressional committees. These publications can help you understand the opposing views that are ever present in debates on policy. A hearing features the testimony of center-stage experts and advocates, and current research on a given policy issue. Reports present major findings and often include dissenting views or interpretations. Your depository library subscribes to these documents, but you can also order copies from the Government Printing Office:

  Superintendent of Documents
  Government Printing Office
  Washington, DC 20402-9371
  (202) 783-3238

  For current bills and committee reports, contact:

  Senate Document Room
  SH-B 04
  Washington, DC 20510
  (202) 224-7860

  House Document Room
  H-226 Capitol
  Washington, DC 20515
  (202) 225-3456

- The *Congressional Quarterly (CQ)* and the *National Journal* are not government documents but are informative periodicals. The *CQ* offers a calendar of upcoming legislative action and articles on current topics and congressional events. *CQ*'s cover has a subject index. *The National Journal* offers weekly, feature-length coverage of politics and government, focusing on the executive branch. Like the *CQ*, it has an index, organized by issue and political actor.

Your Elected Representatives

Elected representatives are yet another ready source of information. Their job is not only to legislate but also to respond to constituent questions and concerns. One representative and two senators represent you at the federal level in the U.S. Congress. At the state level, you have one senator and at least one representative or assembly member serving your interest in the state legislature. To obtain their names, addresses, and phone numbers, consult your local newspaper or inquire from your reference librarian, or, for representatives in Washington, DC, call the capitol switchboard (202) 224-3121. Various directories are also available (see Suggested Readings, pp. 28-29). Information on your state-level representative can be obtained from the following:

Council of State Governments
444 North Capitol Street
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 624-5460

You can contact your federal representatives locally as well as in Washington, DC. Each U.S. senator maintains at least one office within the state, and your U.S. representative has at least one office in your voting district. When you call your representative, **keep these tips in mind**:

- You will most likely speak with an aide rather than directly with your representative. Expect a helpful response, because this person realizes the importance of responding to your concerns. Aides are well-informed and positioned to find answers and solve problems.

- Be as specific as you can in your request. If you know, for instance, the number of the bill you are tracking, the date of a hearing, the name of a law, mention these identifying facts.

- To maximize your information gathering, ask about additional resources—about other people to consult or places to turn.

Congressional Committees

Congressional committees are a further important source of information. Thirty-seven congressional standing committees and over 200 subcommittees review, develop, sometimes stall, or "mark-up," and "vote out of committee" proposed legislation (see diagram, p. 27). Committees authorize programs, propose appropriations, and oversee existing programs. Jurisdiction over the policies that touch children is spread throughout the committee structure. The House and Senate Agriculture committees, for instance, have jurisdiction over WIC, while the House Education and Labor Committee and the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources authorize Head Start and Chapter 1 for disadvantaged school children. There is one committee, however—the House Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families—whose sole business is to focus attention on child and family issues. Its hearings and reports provide up-to-date information (see Library, p. 3), and even if the Select Committee is not currently considering the issue of your concern, its staff can direct you to someone who is. You can contact the committee:

House Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families
385 House Annex II, U.S. Congress
Washington, DC 20515
(202) 226-7660

Child Advocacy Groups

Child advocacy groups are also a valuable source of information. These are groups that "lobby" legislators and officials in government on behalf of specific constituencies. Two things distinguish advocacy and special interest groups from the other sources talked about thus far. First, these groups are made up of private citizens, which gives them a distinct vantage point, outside the government. Second, they are political and

strongly committed to one side of a question. Such groups must, by necessity, be well-informed, since information is an important political tool for them.

A phone call or letter to an advocacy group can yield a wealth of information. Advocates are articulate on their issue. Speak with an expert; request the group's newsletter or publication list; get on the mailing list.

Child advocacy groups typically concentrate their efforts on a single issue or age group—on health, for instance, or on child care; on teenagers or infants. Some, like the Children's Defense Fund, have a broad agenda. Find the group that specializes in your concern. A list of well-known advocacy groups follows. Among them is the National Association of Child Advocates, an organization with 35 independent advocacy group members, representing 44 states.

Child Advocacy Directory

The Association of Child Advocates
P.O. Box 280
Bloomfield, NY 14469
(716) 657-7256

Child Care Action Campaign
330 Seventh Avenue, 17th floor
New York, NY 10001
(212) 239-0138

Children's Defense Fund
25 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 628-8787

Child Welfare League of America
440 First Street, NW, Suite 310
Washington, DC 20001-2085
(202) 638-2952

Coalition for America's Children
1331 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 721-N
Washington, DC 20003-1703
(800) 336-5475
(202) 662-7460

National Association for the Education of Young Children
1834 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20009
(800) 424-2460
(202) 232-8777

National Center for Children in Poverty
Columbia University School of Public Health
154 Haven Avenue
New York, NY 10032
(212) 927-8793

National Center for Clinical Infants Program
733 15th Street, NW, Suite 912
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 347-0308

National Center for Youth Law
114 Sansome Street, Suite 900
San Francisco, CA 94104
(415) 543-3307

Federal Programs Affecting Children

There are many federal programs that protect and serve children. Here are a few of the major ones, with a description of their purpose, level of funding, and numbers eligible and served. Even though some of these programs are entitlements, none can be taken for granted. All come under scrutiny from time to time--for oversight, reauthorization, or the setting of new appropriations or regulations. Be alert to how these policies are being implemented in your state or at the local level. As you become ever more knowledgeable, you may well be in a position to help develop and refine these practices that are already in place.

Income Programs

Aid to Families with Dependent Children

AFDC provides cash payments to needy children who lack support because one parent has died, is disabled, is continually absent from the home, or is unemployed. Eligibility ends on the child's 18th birthday. The program is administered by the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The current average yearly AFDC benefit for a family of three is $4,404. In 1990 AFDC federal funding was $12.3 billion. An estimated 11.4 million individuals participated in the program, including 7.7 million children. In 1989, 47.6% of adults and children in poverty did not receive AFDC benefits.

Child Support Enforcement

This program provides services to establish paternity, to locate absent parents, and to assist in the collection of child support payments. The Family Support Act of 1988 (the Welfare Reform Act) has strengthened this program through provisions that require assigning a social security number at birth, setting child support levels, and the garnishing of wages. The program is administered by the Office of Child Support Enforcement within the Family Support Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In 1989 the program received $941 million and served 1.68 million families.

Tax Programs

Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit

This is a limited tax credit that can be claimed against the costs of child care for children up to age 13 who are the dependents of the taxpayer. Physically or mentally handicapped spouses or dependents of the taxpayer may also qualify. Any individual, regardless of socioeconomic status, may qualify for a tax credit up to $2,400 per child or $4,800 for two or more children. The credit cannot exceed the income of which ever spouse's income is smaller. This tax credit is administered by the Internal Revenue Service of the U.S. Department of the Treasury. In 1992 taxpayers will claim an estimated $2.8 billion under the program.

Earned Income Tax Credit

EITC aids working parents who have low earnings and a dependent child. To receive this refundable credit, a parent need not owe or pay any income tax. A family may receive up to $2020 per year. EITC is administered by the Internal Revenue Service of the U.S. Department of the Treasury. It is projected that, in 1992, 11.5 million families will participate, resulting in a revenue expense of $9.4 billion.

Dependent Tax Exemption

Although not typically characterized as a child program, the taxpayer exemption for child dependents that parents may claim to reduce taxable income results in an important federal support to families with children. Taxpayers in 1991 claimed the $2,150 exemption for approximately 50 million dependent children, amounting to a federal "tax expenditure" of $21 billion.

Nutrition Programs

Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children

WIC provides supplemental foods and nutrition education to pregnant and post-partum women, infants, and children through age 4 who have been determined to be at nutritional risk because of inadequate income. The program is administered by the Food and Nutrition Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. WIC's federal budget for 1992 is $2.6 billion. In 1991 there were an average monthly 4.9 million participants, representing approximately 55% of those eligible.

National School Lunch

The National School Lunch Program provides support for schools to serve lunches to students each school day. The program requires that all children have access to subsidized lunches that meet nutritional standards set by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Children from low-income families can receive lunches free or at reduced rates. Schools cannot earn a profit on their lunch program. Nonprofit, public and private, elementary and secondary schools are eligible to participate. The program is administered by the Food and Nutrition Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In 1991 the program received $3.6 billion and and served 24.7 million children.

Food Stamps

Low-income families or individuals exchange Food Stamps for food items in local markets. Eligibility for this food supplement depends on household monthly cash income. Families who receive AFDC or SSI (Supplemental Security Income) are automatically eligible. The program is located in the U.S. Department of Agriculture and is carried out by state welfare departments. In 1991 the federal government outlay for Food Stamps was $18.7 billion to a monthly average 22.6 million recipients, approximately two-thirds of those eligible.

Social Service Programs

Head Start

Head Start provides educational, social, health, and nutritional services to low-income children before they enter school. The goal of this program is to enhance the early development of children disadvantaged by poverty. Children must be from families at or below the poverty line to be eligible.

Head Start is administered by the Administration of Children, Youth, and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In 1991 Head Start received $1.95 billion in federal funding and served 596,295 children. The 1992 appropriation of $2.2 billion is expected to serve approximatley 660,000 children. The reauthorization of Head Start in 1990 included a set-aside of more than $30 million to serve infants and toddlers; funds for additional educational and social services, for parental involvement, for transportation, facility improvement, and insurance; increased support for teacher training and enhanced wages; and funds for transition projects for continued services after children enter school ($20 million). The program authorized $33 billion for six years, an amount sufficient to serve, by 1997, all eligible 3- and 4-year-olds and 30% of eligible 5-year-olds.

Comprehensive Child Development Program

The Comprehensive Child Development Program (CCDP) offers services to low-income families in health and nutritional care, child care, and early childhood development. Children (from birth to school age) and their parents benefit from prenatal care, parenting education, income support, referral to education and employment training, housing assistance, and other needed services.

This program is administered by the Administration of Children, Youth, and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Federal funds were set at $24 million for 1992. CCDP is administered in 36 sites, including public schools, community-based social service agencies, Head Start programs (see p. 12) and health centers. Participation data for CCDP is unavailable.

Child Care and Development Block Grant

Child Care and Development Block Grants assist states in developing and enhancing child care services. Funding may be used for direct services, on a sliding fee scale, and for improvement activities in resource and referral, training, monitoring of licensing, and caregiver salary enhancement. One portion, 18.75%, must focus on early childhood development and before- and after-school care. States are mandated to establish standards in the prevention and control of infectious diseases, building and physical safety, and caregiver safety training. The authorization for 1992 was set at $825 million.

Social Service Block Grant

Social Service Block Grants are provided to the states for activities considered appropriate by the individual state. Typical activities include child care, protective services for children, and home care services for the handicapped. There are no federal eligibility requirements; eligibility is determined by the states, which are allocated funds based on population size. Among other goals, this grant's objective is to eliminate child abuse and neglect. It provides day care, emergency and protective services for children and adults, information and referral services, adoption services, foster care, counseling, and transportation.

In 1992 this program has been funded at $2.8 billion. Not all of the funds are channeled to child service, since the grants serve other purposes as well. Funds are granted on a quarterly basis to all states; information on the apportioning of the grant is unavailable. The Social Service Block Grant is administered by the Administration of Children, Youth, and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Foster Care, Child Welfare, and Adoption Programs

Social Security Titles IV-E and IV-B are permanently authorized to help states provide protection and services to children through foster care and child welfare programs. The largest portion is for foster care (IV-E), which is an entitlement that provides maintenance payments for AFDC-eligible children in foster care. Child welfare (IV-B) includes preventive and protective services to children and families, child welfare training, and research and development. The adoption program assists families who adopt special needs children. The system is intended overall to enhance family preservation and reunification—that is, to help families remain intact and to return children in foster care to their birth families whenever possible. The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 heightened requirements and incentives to states to improve services and provide for permanency in placements.

Federal funding in 1992 for Title IV-E foster care was an estimated $2.2 billion, for Title IV-B, $364 million. In 1986 the average monthly number of children in foster care was estimated to be 108,000. Current estimates range up to 250,000.

Education Programs

Chapter 1, Compensatory Education for Disadvantaged Children

This program provides grants to state and local education agencies (S.E.A. and L.E.A.) for the education of disadvantaged children, including migrant, handicapped, neglected, and delinquent children. Grants are awarded based on a formula that takes into account the number of low-income children in the local school district. The program is administered by the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, the U.S. Department of Education, through state and local educational agenices. They provide a combined total of $6.14 billion serving 5.9 million participants.

Even Start

Even Start provides a developmental program for young children, adult literacy training, training of parents to assist in their children's education, and parent support services such as child care and transportation. Services are geared toward strengthening the parent-child relationship.

Educationally disadvantaged children aged one to seven and their parents qualify for Even Start's services. These services are provided by the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education within the U.S. Department of Education. In 1992 Even Start received $17 million. Participation data for Even Start is not yet available.

Education Block Grants for States

These grants aim to enhance school improvement and effectiveness through educational innovation. Activities supported by these grants include programs for students at risk of failure or of dropping out, innovative programs for school-wide improvement, acquisition of educational materials, teacher training and professional development, and programs to promote personal excellence. All public and private elementary and secondary school students are eligible to receive this grant.

Although the U.S. Department of Education administers this program, local educational agencies design and implement the programs; they receive at least 80% of each respective state's allotment. State educational agencies use the remainder of the funds for administrative purposes, technical assistance for local educational agencies, and Effective Schools programs. This program received $450 million in 1992.

Education of the Handicapped Amendments

This act, authorized in 1986, provides incentives and assistance to states to expand services to children with handicaps. The Preschool Program encourages the enhancement of services to preschoolers. An additional provision, Part H, assists states in designing new comprehensive service systems for infants and toddlers with handicaps and their families. Key provisions of Part H include an emphasis on service coordination and a comprehensive child find system, i.e., outreach to eligible children. The 1992 appropriation for Part H was $175 million. Data on participation are unavailable.

Health Programs

Medicaid

Medicaid provides medical assistance for low-income people who are aged, blind, disabled, or members of families with dependent children. Each state chooses the range of services it will offer. Yet all states must offer in-patient and out-patient hospital services, laboratory and x-ray services, skilled nursing facility (S.N.F.) for those over age 21, and home health care for skilled nursing facility recipients. Medicaid also provides family planning services, rural health services, physician or clinic services, certified midwife services, and nurse practitioner services. States must also provide early and periodic screening, diagnosis, and treatment services to participants under age 24.

Medicaid is typically linked to actual or potential cash receipt from either AFDC (see p. 9) or SSI (Supplemental Security Income) for the elderly, disabled, and blind. States may provide Medicaid to other low-income groups at their discretion, but must provide coverage to all pregnant women and children up to age six with family incomes up to 133% of poverty.

Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant

This grant offers health services to mothers and children, especially those of low income or limited access to medical care. The grant is aimed at reducing infant mortality and preventable and handicapping conditions among children. It provides low-income mothers with prenatal, delivery, and post-partum care.

States determine individual eligibility, and they may charge for services when mothers do not fall below the poverty level. The program itself is funded at the federal level by the Health Resources and Services Administration in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The program received $649.65 million in 1992. Participation data is unavailable.

Childhood Immunization

State and community health agencies receive these grants to establish and maintain immunization programs to control vaccine-preventable childhood diseases. Qualifying agencies apply for grants from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In 1990 nearly 16.8 million doses of childhood vaccines were administered through this program. The program received $296.6 million in 1992.

Housing Programs

Low-Income Public Housing

This program provides low-rent, standard housing primarily for families with children, although elderly or handicapped individuals are also eligible. Only 30% of the occupancy may be allotted to other single people. Eligible people must have incomes below 80% of the local median income. Priority is given to families living under substandard conditions, to those involuntarily displaced by government action, or to those paying over 50% of their income for rent.

This program is administered by the Office of Public Housing of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. It is funded by the sale of tax-exempt notes and bonds or through a federal grant handled by local public housing agencies. The local government waives an individual's property taxes; it then accepts payments in lieu of taxes that account for a maximum of 10% of shelter rent. In 1991, 1.4 million housing units were eligible for assistance. The program received approximately $6.2 billion.

STEP TWO:
Taking Action

"It's all well and good to be informed, but I want to DO something!"

Gathering information and building your knowledge is an ongoing process—there will always be more to learn. But once you begin to feel comfortable with an issue— yes, your next step is to take action. Here are some of the many ways to have a say on behalf of children.

Voting

Voting is a first responsibility for all of us. To register to vote, you must be at least 18, a citizen of the U.S., and a resident of the city or location where you intend to vote. To learn in what ward you vote, call your town clerk.

Supporting Candidates

You can also work toward your goals by **supporting candidates** who share your views. Seek out the candidate of your choice, offer assistance, lend a hand.

Writing Letters

You can use **letter-writing** to educate, to gain public support, or to express your desires as a concerned citizen. And it's easy and inexpensive. All you need is your organized information and an audience.

Here are some guidelines:

1. **Be concise.** Make your letter one page, if possible.

2. **Cater to your reader.** A letter to the editor may be quite different from one to a member of Congress or to a federal agency.

3. **Be explicit.** Don't assume what the reader knows. Specify information that identifies or clarifies your issue. For instance, if your letter concerns a piece of legislation, give its name or bill number.

4. **State your purpose.** Do you want to persuade, to offer support, to educate?

5. State your position. How does the issue affect you or those on whose behalf you're writing?

6. Make your purpose clear. If you intend to motivate your reader, specify what you would like done.

7. Suggest alternatives if you are opposing a policy.

8. Be polite. In writing a congressional representative or your state legislator, appealing to reason may elicit more consideration.

9. Request a response, if appropriate. You may, for instance, want to know more about your representative's own position or plans for action.

10. A handy trick—once you've drafted your letter, try moving your last sentence or closing idea to the opening of your letter. Does this give your letter more punch?

Here is the suggested form for addressing a letter to your federal senator or representative. The same applies to state representatives, except you would use your state capitol as the address:

The Honorable _____ U.S. Senate Washington, DC 20510	The Honorable _____ U.S. House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515
Dear Senator _____:	Dear Representative _____:

Attending and Organizing Public Events

Attending and organizing briefings, lectures, demonstrations, rallies, and marches can be an effective way of acting on your commitment to children. Such events serve various purposes:

- to educate or "raise consciousness"
- to identify a constituency with common objectives
- to galvanize public support
- to alert policymakers of public sentiment and conviction on an issue

Attending public events is easily accomplished. Watch for announcements in the media. Local interest groups will host events that you may want to attend. Learn from these events; make contact with like-minded constituents. Interest groups may even organize transportation to your state or federal capital for special citizen gatherings. Such events can, and sometimes do, send a powerful message to policymakers. Your very presence may be instrumental in affecting policy.

Organizing public events takes more planning. Here are some things to keep in mind:

1. **Support.** Be realistic. Building support is essential to success. Minimal turnout could be detrimental to your cause.

2. **Publicity**. Flyers, posters, newspaper ads, and word of mouth—all can be effective. Target publicity to your intended audience. This step is crucial to ensuring good attendance.

3. **Timing**. Pick a time and place for optimal turnout.

4. **Preparations**. Think ahead. Confirm speakers, reserve or get permission to use desired locations, prepare materials. Work out the details in advance.

Advocating and Lobbying

Yet another way to take action is to support or join a child advocacy group. You can contribute through donations or through volunteering your time and expertise. You can help by canvassing, by phoning, by simply doing what's needed. But you can also, as an informed constituent, offer your acquired knowledge and understanding of strategy.

Finally, you may want to consider becoming a lobbyist, whose role it is to persuade and pressure the politician to adopt goals that promote children's well-being. A lobbyist must be "registered" and is sometimes paid. Registration requirements vary by state. To determine requirements in your state, contact your state representative or inquire through your governor's office.

Policymaking Process

Policymaking has been likened to a "moving target." At times this target can move painfully slowly, at other times, precipitously—it never stands still. An important part of your strategy is knowing when to act. Timing can be crucial. Following are suggested points of entry for citizen participation and an illustration tracing the legislative process (p. 27).

Points of Entry for Citizen Participation

1. Identifying a problem, documenting need, alerting the public—these are often the first stepping stones toward legislative change. Do not underestimate the power of organized public pressure to create or inspire legislative initiative. In the early stages, letter-writing, concerted pressure, disseminated information can all serve to put the process in motion.

2. The birth of a bill depends so much on circumstance, on political climate, public support, sometimes on the commitment or ingenuity of an individual policymaker or a coalition of key actors. Once formulated, the bill is introduced in either the Senate or House of Representatives by the sponsoring representative. The respective leadership can then assign the proposal to a committee, and in turn to the appropriate subcommittee.

3. Committee and subcommittee hearings provide the forum for bipartisan scrutiny of proposed legislation. This is the point in the process when witnesses come forward to testify to the merits or flaws of a proposal. Witnesses can include a wide range of "experts"—from the teenager who describes her life in foster care,

to the researcher who supplies current data on child care effects, to the economist who estimates the costs involved. Officials from the executive may also testify when a proposal involves a federal department or agency.

4. If a bill involves federal spending (e.g., a new child health program) or revenues (e.g., an increased child care tax credit), its cost to the federal government must be estimated by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) or the Joint Committee on Taxation (JCT). These estimates are key to a bill's successful implementation, because the budget agreement adopted each year limits the amount of federal resources each committee can "spend." CBO and JCT estimates can be requested by a bill's sponsor at any time. Committees generally do not vote on spending or taxing bills without these estimates.

5. The subcommittee and full committee shape and eventually "mark up" and "vote out of committee" their version of the bill, which is then ready to be taken to the House or Senate floor for further debate and vote.

6. A piece of legislation that survives a vote in both the House and Senate may yet be referred to a conference committee for further fine tuning when House and Senate versions differ.

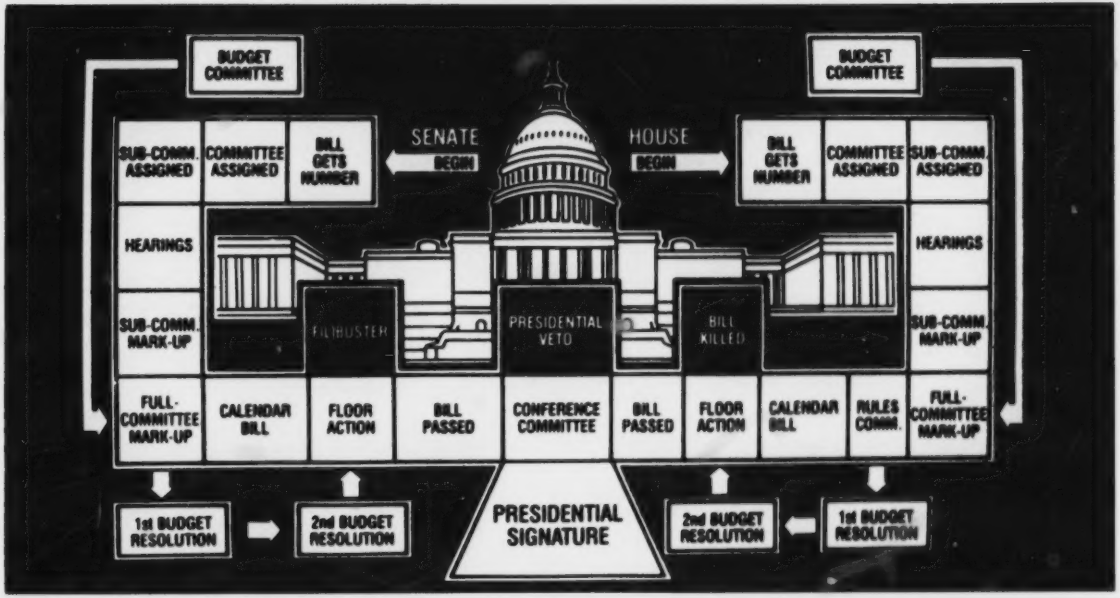
7. All along the way—from subcommittee approval, to full committee, to conference, to floor debate, to vote—legislators are susceptible to public input and need to hear from their constituents.

Two more openings for action should not be overlooked:

8. Getting a law passed is a first step to new policy, but implementing a law is the next crucial phase. It is the job of executive agencies to interpret new legislation and provide the regulations that are to guide how it is carried out. Such regulations appear in the *Federal Register*, and citizens are frequently given an opportunity to support or oppose proposed implementation. This is another point where you can have a say.

9. An implemented law eventually comes due for review—a process called oversight. It is at this point that we ask the question, how is the policy working? If you have been following the unfolding of a policy all along, you may well be in a position to offer data or case material that reflects on its effectiveness. Is the intent of the law being followed? Is it affecting the right people? Is funding well spent?

How a Bill Becomes a Law



This illustrates how a bill moves in the House and Senate. It also shows the Budget committees' input through Budget Resolutions which set fiscal year limits on spending and revenue-raising authorizations and appropriations. For information on the congressional budget process, write the House Budget Committee, 214 House Annex One, Washington, DC 20515. Phone (202) 226-7200. Illustration, courtesy of U.S. Congress Handbook.

Suggested Readings and Resources

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Huston, A. C. (Ed.). (1991). *Children in poverty: Child development and social policy.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

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Stevenson, H. W., & Siegel, A. E. (Eds.). (1984). *Child development research and social policy.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

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Zigler, E. F., Kagan, S. L., & Klugman, E. (1983). *Children, families, and government: Perspectives on American social policy.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Additional copies available from the Michigan Program in Child Development and Social Policy, 3415 Mason Hall, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1027. Cost: $3.50 per copy.